

Can Yasser Arafat Stop the Violence in the Middle East? CNN October 17, 2000; Tuesday



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HEADLINE: Can Yasser Arafat Stop the Violence in the Middle East?

GUESTS: Oded Eran, Hassan Abdel Rahman

BYLINE: Lou Waters

HIGHLIGHT:

Some Palestinian groups today expressed skepticism over the Sharm el- Sheikh agreement. They say it's impossible for the Palestinian leadership to flip the switch and turn off the violence.

BODY:

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LOU WATERS, CNN ANCHOR: Some Palestinian groups today expressed skepticism over the Sharm El-Sheikh agreement. They say it's impossible for the Palestinian leadership to flip the switch and turn off the violence.

Former President Carter, the catalyst for the first Camp David summit, echoed that sentiment in a conversation with CNN.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JIMMY CARTER, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: If we think that Arafat can just issue an edict or an order, like a dictator, and everyone is going to get off the streets or everyone is going to comply completely with a peaceful settlement, we're sadly mistaken.

He obviously has a great deal of influence because the Palestinians, even those who don't agree with him often, realize there's no other leader that can come close to holding the diverse element in the Palestinian community together. So they respect him to stay there.

Can Yasser Arafat Stop the Violence in the Middle East? CNN October 17, 2000; Tuesday

But I think we greatly overestimate in the American press and in the American government circles in Washington the power and the authority of Arafat to order the Palestinians to stop expressing their grievances.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WATERS: Joining us here in Atlanta, Oded Eran. He is the former Israeli ambassador to Jordan and the chief negotiator for the Israeli delegation.

Welcome, Mr. Ambassador.

ODED ERAN, FORMER ISRAELI AMBASSADOR TO JORDAN: Thank you very much.

WATERS: And in Washington, Hassan Abdel Rahman. He's the Palestinian representative to the United States.

You heard what Mr. Carter had to say Mr. Rahman. We have Yasser Arafat with a problem here. Most people agree that he can't just flick a switch and turn off the violence. How difficult is it going to be for him, as "The New York Times" asked today, for Arafat to turn it off?

HASSAN ABDEL RAHMAN, PALESTINIAN REP. TO U.S.: I think President Clinton said something -- President Carter said something very important, also, that as long as there are the advances for the Palestinian people, they have to be expressed somehow.

The problem of the violence is not because the Palestinians expressed frustration, it is because really when they do so they are faced with Israeli military attacks that kill Palestinians and wound Palestinians. So in order, really, to stop those clashes, what we need is for the Israelis to move their heavy equipment and their army from Palestinian towns, villages and streets, and then if the Palestinians express themselves, they will not be expressing themselves in a way against the Israeli military, they will be doing that very peacefully.

But the presence of the Israeli military and the shooting by the Israelis of Palestinians -- like today, for example, not only one was killed, there were three Palestinians killed and more than 60 wounded -- that is what creates the kind of disturbances that we see on the -- on the ground.

WATERS: Would you agree with that Mr. Eran. Were those kinds of weapons that Mr. Rahman refers to around when the rioting broke out near the Temple Mount?

ERAN: The riots that broke out when Palestinians approached Israeli civilians and Israeli soldiers. These Israeli soldiers and civilians were not in Palestinian towns to begin with. They came near there to stop the violence and stop them from reaching Israeli settlements, Israeli civilians and Israeli soldiers.

I think what we are looking for Mr. Arafat is to rein in those organizations that are under his control and will follow his clear signal, if there is a clear signal. And millions of viewers saw Palestinian policeman using firearms. Millions of viewers saw the Tanzim people, who were illegally and still are illegally armed, using live ammunition against Israeli -- Israeli settlers and against Israeli policeman and soldiers.

So this is what we asking. We're not asking that every Palestinian individual who wants to demonstrate peacefully or not will obey Arafat. This is hopefully the optimal situation. But we are asking Arafat to reign in those organizations which obey him, and these are the majority of the demonstrators.

WATERS: Are there any good signs here? We have Yasser Arafat saying we expect an honest and accurate implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement. Then we have Mr. Barghouti, the head of the Arafat Fatah organization saying the intifada will continue. That is a kind of a challenge, is it not, Mr. Rahman, to Mr. Arafat's authority? Does that bother you?

RAHMAN: Before I answer you, I want to make some correction to the statement that made by Ambassador Eran. First of all, he says that the Palestinians attacked Israelis. Where: in Israeli or on



Can Yasser Arafat Stop the Violence in the Middle East? CNN October 17, 2000; Tuesday

Palestinian territory? He's saying that: Oh, they are in not Palestinian territories. Where those soldiers are? Are they on Palestinian territories? Where are Jewish settlements?

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: They were not in towns. There is an agreement...

RAHMAN: Well, of course there is.

ERAN: ... which we abide by. We are in the worst

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: We went to the summit in Camp David in order to reach agreement by which we will evacuate Palestinian territories as part of the agreement.

RAHMAN: But Mr. Eran...

ERAN: For one reason or another, Mr. Arafat rejected all the proposals there.

(CROSSTALK)

RAHMAN: No, you are not saying what happened, believe me, because, first of all, Israel did not implement the agreement we signed in Sharm el-Sheikh in February.

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: Forgive me, I was negotiating with your colleague for months.

(CROSSTALK)

RAHMAN: Are you going to let me finish my statement, or not?

ERAN: Please do.

RAHMAN: OK. So let me finish. There are agreements, which Israel failed to implement. And those are the failed redeployment of Israeli troops from Palestinian territories. Now, the first attack on the Palestinians happened near Haram al-Sharif when the Palestinian demonstrated on Friday on the 29th of September. And...

ERAN: This is to best of my knowledge, in Israel, this is the Temple Mount. And it's in Jerusalem.

(CROSSTALK)

RAHMAN: Is Temple Mount, is al-Haram as-Sharif. And that is occupied Jerusalem.

ERAN: That's in your view.

(CROSSTALK) RAHMAN: But no one recognized it. You did it unilaterally. And all the international community condemned you for doing that.

ERAN: We went to Camp David. We went to Camp David to negotiate.

RAHMAN: So what are you talking about? You killed Palestinians.

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: I'm sorry. If you are -- if you continue to distort the facts and the truth, I cannot allow you to do this.

RAHMAN: No, I am not distorting.

(CROSSTALK)

WATERS: Excuse me, gentleman, but -- excuse me, gentlemen. We are getting sort of a microcosm of the problem in the Middle East.

ERAN: Absolutely.

Can Yasser Arafat Stop the Violence in the Middle East? CNN October 17, 2000; Tuesday

WATERS: When we have a couple of negotiators here arguing over a point, Jerusalem, which apparently was on a track toward being settled after the Camp David summit. And that fell apart. So there is an issue of religion...

RAHMAN: But...

WATERS: ... and nationalism mixed together here. My question to you is...

(CROSSTALK)

WATERS: ... are we ever get going to get past this? You see any -- anything positive in the future? Can there be peace in the region?

ERAN: There can be peace.

RAHMAN: If you allow me -- if you allow me.

ERAN: There can be peace. But the two sides have to take courageous decisions. What we saw in Camp David is an attempt by the prime minister of Israel to walk the extra mile, to make the necessary steps in order to reach an agreement. For whatever reason, whether he was unable or unwilling, Chairman Arafat rejected all the proposals that were made by President Clinton. It came...

RAHMAN: Not by President Clinton. Can I say something?

WATERS: Yes, answer that. Answer that.

RAHMAN: Please. I mean, you know, whenever I say something, he interrupts me.

WATERS: Go ahead. Go ahead. RAHMAN: I hope that you will make this a fair exchange. First of all, that's not totally accurate what Mr. Eran is saying. Jerusalem occupied in 1967. The annexation of Jerusalem was never recognized by the United States or by any other country.

ERAN: You went to negotiate it.

RAHMAN: But this is -- I mean, definitely, but what I am saying, you said that Jerusalem is part of Israel. I'm telling no, because one recognizes your annexation. So when the Palestinians demonstrate in Jerusalem, you shot and killed six Palestinians and wounded 200. That was the beginning of this conflict.

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: It takes us nowhere. You mutilated two -- two Israeli soldiers beyond any recognition.

RAHMAN: But that's...

(CROSSTALK)

RAHMAN: I am not saying -- Mr. -- I am -- I'm talking about how this conflict initiated. You killed six Palestinian, wounded 200 in demonstrations.

ERAN: This is not how it started.

RAHMAN: This was on the 29th. Now, you are talking about peace proposals made by Israel. All the proposals that were made by Israel are inconsistent with the international legality, with what is required of from us. We will require from you to withdraw from all the occupied territories. You wanted to withdraw from part of the occupied territories. We...

ERAN: A compromise is something which both sides have to agree to.

RAHMAN: You know, I really cannot continue this if you continue to interrupt me.

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: You cannot speak for a half-an-hour explaining your opposition, which is a distortion

(CROSSTALK)

WATERS: Gentleman.



Can Yasser Arafat Stop the Violence in the Middle East? CNN October 17, 2000; Tuesday

(CROSSTALK)

RAHMAN: No, but I listen to you to say whatever you want to.

(CROSSTALK) WATERS: Gentlemen, we're -- hello, hello, we're on television. We don't have that much time. And nothing will be settled on this score here.

RAHMAN: Yes, but I mean...

WATERS: But what I'm trying to get at here is the international effort to try to find peace in the Middle East between Palestinians and Israelis. We now have the United Nations involved, because Kofi Annan was instrumental in facilitating this meeting in Sharm el- Sheikh. We now have the Arab League meeting on this weekend you. Do you see a greater international participation in this process? And is there, perhaps, a positive sign that peace can be achieved in the Middle East?

Now, without getting into the particulars you've been getting into, try to answer that question.

ERAN: As far as I can see, the international community is very important in helping the two sides reach an agreement. At the end of the day, it is for the two sides to decide how they want to conduct their coexistence. It is a coexistence. And it has to be done peacefully. And it has to be done bilaterally by the two sides.

WATERS: All right.

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: What it takes is courage, political courage and political vision...

RAHMAN: Can I...

WATERS: Yes, you...

ERAN: And political to do it in a peaceful way. What we have seen in the last three weeks is an attempt to force the issue by force. And my greater accusation against Mr. Arafat is that he taken the wind out of the peace sails in the peace camp in Israel. There are many now who doubt the...

RAHMAN: Can I...

ERAN: ... course that they have taken in their efforts for

(CROSSTALK)

ERAN: And this is something which is really a serious problem.

RAHMAN: Can I say something, sir?

WATERS: Yes, sir, Mr. Rahman, you have the last word -- same question, please. Same question.

(CROSSTALK) RAHMAN: I tell you how we end all of this. The Palestinian people have been living under Israeli military occupation for 33 years. They are denied their freedom, their dignity and their right to live as an independent people. As long as Israel continues to occupy them and to want to impose its will on the Palestinian people by sheer military force, I don't think that peace the possible.

When Israel starts dealing with the Palestinians as its equal, when Israel starts respecting the humanity of the Palestinians, and feel that Palestinian life is equal to Jewish life, then I believe we can make peace.

WATERS: That's a good place to end it. Thank you both for giving us insight inside the process -- a couple of negotiators in this whole peace process. Former the Israeli ambassador to Jordan, Oded Eran, we thank you so much for being here, sir. And Hassan Abdel Rahman in Washington.

RAHMAN: Thank you.

WATERS: We thank you both. Hope to talk to you again. And good luck.

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